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## Q. HORATIUS FLACCUS, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF ETHICS

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So much has been said and written about Horace that it can do no harm to add a little more. And surely there is a little more to say about a poet whose *Odes* have appealed to translators so diverse as Eugene Field and William Gladstone, to editors so different as a specialist in Latin syntax and an authority on Greek philosophy. The closeted scholar and the man on the street, young boy and old boy, all extremes are brought together by the golden mean of Horace. Golf is claimed to be the best recreation for all ages, and to prove it we have fathers' and sons' tournaments; but a recreation just as universal is the translation of Horace's *Odes*—a game in which we have seen within recent years father and son competing side by side.

To many the mention of Horace brings to mind the lighter odes, bibulous and amorous, which sing of those unreal ladies whom Professor Kirby Smith calls "fair and fragile Hellenic damsels of syllabled air." But our interest on this occasion lies in the other Horace, the teacher of philosophy, *philosophiae doctor*—not the Ph.D. of today, who is reputed to be and, I regret to say, too often is the narrow specialist who wears blinders and sees nothing through his microscopic eye except the infinitesimal fragment of the cosmos which he is scrutinizing. But Horace was not interested in the whole field of philosophy; practical Roman that he was, he concerned himself chiefly with its most practical side, that of ethics. A survey of all Horace's poetry would be necessary to give a complete picture of his ethics, but a study of his *Odes* from a rather new point of view will serve to show, I think, the importance which he attached to his ethical precepts.

That the essence of Horace's philosophy is Greek and that his very words are often merely paraphrases of the Greek is known to all. But we must not forget that Horace's own experience modi-

fied the teachings of the Greeks, especially in the matter of emphasis. In the fourth satire of the first book he tells us how he received instruction in morals from his father by concrete example. The passage reads thus (vss. 107-111): "When he was urging me to live simply and frugally, content with what he had laid aside for me, he said: 'Don't you see how badly off Albius' son is, and how poor Baius is? It's a good lesson for one not to waste his patrimony.'" This habit of observing the people about him and drawing lessons from them Horace maintained throughout his life. In the sixth satire of the first book he tells us that it was his custom to wander about the circus with its numerous fakirs and to join the crowds in watching the fortune tellers. Such a sight would start him to thinking of his favorite philosophy. The result is his "Carpe diem" ode, in which he tells Leuconoe not to patronize the astrologers. In the same way he uses personal experiences, scenes from nature, even friendships, to develop a text. And so he passes on to the girls and boys, *virginibus puerisque*, the results of those intimate observations of life which his father had taught him to make. In other words, he is doing what all good teachers do, bringing his subject-matter into relation with life, or, to use a word which I abhor, "vitalizing" his subject.

I have spoken of the "texts" in these ethical poems because Horace is really preaching sermons. Teaching ethics and preaching sermons *may* be one and the same thing. The text is the important thing in these odes, and we should speak of them, not by number, nor by first line, but by text, as the "Carpe diem" poem. That Horace considered the text the most important thing in these poems is shown by the fact that it is usually one of the phrases whose painstaking felicity is generally recognized. If we remember the text we remember the thought of the poem and a fine phrase besides.

In addition to contact with life and the text, a common feature is the development by means of mythological and historical material, much after the fashion of the minister who introduces stories from the Bible. Finally, when the text has been rather gloomy and the preaching somewhat evident, Horace tactfully lightens the gloom by some cheering remark at the end.

We may illustrate these characteristics from the poems themselves. The third ode is the well-known propempticon to Virgil. But Horace's prayer for his famous friend's safe arrival in Greece is only incidental to a higher purpose. The dangers of the deep lead to the familiar thought of the wickedness of man in crossing the seas. The simplicity of the further development of the thought seems to have escaped notice. The long discussion (sixteen lines) about the sea ends with the transitional line: "Bold to endure anything the human race rushes into all forbidden sins. Bold scion of Iapetus brought fire to the earth," etc. The repetition of the word *audax*, "bold," marks the transition to the next thought, the evil caused by the use of fire (seven lines). Daedalus' aëroplaning receives two lines, Hercules' exploit in breaking through (*perrupit*) to the lower world (it was the earth he broke through) is given one line. Thus we have a discussion of the evils associated with the four elements: water, fire, air, and earth. Then comes the summing up of it all in the fine text *Nil mortalibus arduist*, "Nothing is too hard for mortals."

The fourth poem starts out as a joyous spring poem, but after twelve lines the atmosphere is chilled by the mention of pale death. Why should a bright spring day suggest death of all things? The first line gives the key to Horace's thought: winter is being broken up by the *change* of spring. It is the marvelous change from the chill winds of yesterday to the sunshine of today that strikes the poet. Tomorrow we shall have winter again—and so it is in life. All of which leads to the text: *vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*, "The brief span of life forbids long hopes." (I cannot agree with Smith that the main motive is expressed in vss. 9-12.) The text is then expanded by the thought that the dead weight of night and Pluto's realm will press us down. From this gloom Horace rescues us by reminding us of the beauty of Lycidas here and now. As is well known, Horace imitates this poem in iv. 7, and there the thought-connection is made quite clear and confirms our interpretation of the earlier poem. Spring has come, the earth has changed her garb, the graces and nymphs hold joyous dances. This is followed immediately by the text, so oddly contrasting: *immortalia ne speres*, "Hope not for immortality"—the very

seasons warn against such hopes. Spring follows winter, summer spring, and soon it is winter again. This insistence on the close association of birth and death may be due to Epicureanism; it is a commonplace in Lucretius. Here then a description of nature is but a setting for his ethical creed. We may say that it is no reflection on Horace's art that he does this. We have a similar situation in our modern novels. I suppose that it is pretty generally agreed that a philosophy of life is desirable in a novel. If it is artistically written as well, it may be a great novel.

In the seventh poem Horace devotes a long *praeteritio* to the glories of foreign regions, concluding with the praise of Tivoli as surpassing them all. Then follows a simile which seems so disconnected from the preceding that many have thought that a new poem begins here, just as in the fourth ode one almost feels that a new poem begins after the praise of spring. Horace says, in effect: "Just as the south wind sometimes brings clear weather instead of the usual storms, so should you, Plancus, drive dull care away and bring sunshine into your life, whether you be in camp, as you are, or are to be at Tivoli." The thought is developed further by the introduction of the story of Teucer. The poem becomes intelligible as a whole when we reconstruct the situation. Plancus writes to Horace from camp bemoaning his lot and wishing he were at his beloved Tivoli (*tui*, vs. 21), perhaps adding that the description of its glories would be a fine theme for Horace's poetic powers. Horace, in answer to the letter, says: "Yes, your Tivoli is the finest place in the world, but you must be brave and make the best of the situation; a draught of wine is the best cure for your homesickness." The text is *tu sapiens finire memento tristitiam*, but it is summed up better at the end of the story of Teucer: *nunc vino pellite curas*, "Now drive care away with wine."

The ninth ode, the famous "Soracte" poem, utilizes a fine miniature description of a winter scene—reminding one of some of the exquisite little paintings of the Dutch artists—for the purpose of illustrating the text: *Quid sit futurum cras fuge quaerere*, "Do not ask what the morrow will bring forth."

The eleventh ode is the "Carpe diem" poem, to which reference has already been made. The twelfth, a long ode, is very interesting.

Following a suggestion of Pindar, Horace improvises on his lyre, so to speak, searching for a suitable theme. He touches on one and another, and then suddenly *the* theme bursts forth, and we realize that all the improvisation had skilfully prepared the way for it; it is the joint glory of Jupiter and Augustus—well summed up in the text: *tu* [Jupiter] *secundo Caesare regnes*, “May you, Jupiter, reign, with Caesar as your second.” But in verse 18 Horace had said that Jupiter had no second. I agree with those editors who think this inconsistency intentional. To call it gross flattery is to miss the point of the ode, for it is Horace’s purpose to set up Augustus, not merely as a great ruler, but as a great god, deserving of the worship of his subjects. The compliment is not a personal one for Augustus.

The sixteenth poem, beginning *O matre pulchra filia pulchrior*, “O daughter, more beautiful than your beautiful mother,” is undoubtedly based on as real an experience as any in the *Odes*. The unnamed girl to whom he expresses repentance for his anger is as real as Virgil, Maecenas, and other famous characters. The personal motive is elaborated by introducing Prometheus from the realm of myth, and we are led finally to the text, *compesce mentem*, “Restrain your temper.”

The eighteenth ode devotes six lines to the blessings of wine and the trials of the “drys” (*siccis*) and ten lines to the evils of intemperance. The former is therefore merely preliminary to the latter, and the real text of the poem is *ne quis modici transiliat munera liberi*. Incidentally I may say that the fact that this is the text line, intended to stand out by itself, helps to show, it seems to me, that *transiliat* is felt as independent, and that we have an example of parataxis: “Let no one transgress the bounds of moderation in wine, the brawls of the Centaurs and Lapiths are a warning.” The same thing is true of iv. 7, *ne immortalia speres, monet annus*; here the first three words are the text of the poem.

The twenty-second ode is the “Integer vitae”; the man upright in life and free from crime needs nothing to protect him, wherever he may be. Witness the poet himself, putting to flight a wolf by his singing. The poem has usually been regarded as a burlesque

or a parody, but Professor Hendrickson<sup>1</sup> is right in rebuking this conception. On the other hand, Professor Shorey<sup>2</sup> is correct in protesting in reply against attributing an exalted lyric seriousness to the whole poem, or a purely erotic significance.<sup>3</sup> I believe that the personal experience is real: Horace met a wolf in the woods and it ran away. The experience was seized upon by the poet to point a moral. The text of the poem is in the first lines, and I believe that these are meant to stand out as a serious thought, poetically, not logically, deduced from the experience. The poem may have a further significance. To sing of Lalage evidently means to write erotic poetry. Are not the first few lines intended by Horace as a defense of this kind of poetry by the familiar device of saying that he himself is upright, even if he does write such verse? As Catullus says, *Nam castum esse decet pium poetam ipsum, versiculos nihil necessest*.<sup>4</sup>

In connection with this poem it is instructive to consider the thirty-fourth ode, the so-called recantation of Epicureanism, which is neither flippant nor comic nor hypocritical, and yet is not meant in all seriousness. The personal experience, in this case the view of lightning in a clear sky, is similarly introduced in the second place and by the same word, *namque*. The Epicureans explained lightning as due to the clashing of clouds, and the sight of lightning without clouds leads Horace to say that their philosophy must be wrong. But that does not mean that he abandoned Epicureanism. His interest was not in its scientific, but in its ethical, side. He did not, like Lucretius, need a detailed exposition of nature to make him a believer. The experience he had and the reflections about it lead to the text which he wishes to emphasize, *Valet ima summis mutare et insignem attenuat deus, obscura promens*, "God can change the position of the high and the low, he humbles the mighty and exalts the lowly."

<sup>1</sup> *Classical Journal*, V, 250 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 317 ff.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent interpretation is found in Medley's *Interpretations of Horace* (1910), p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> See Throop, "The Lives and Verse of Roman Erotic Writers," *Washington University Studies*, I, 160 ff. Throop does not discuss the "Integer vitae" poem.

In the twenty-fourth ode the consolation to Virgil on the death of Quintilius naturally leads to the text at the end, *Leuius fit patientia quicquid corrigere est nefas*, "Patience makes lighter what it is sin to try to change."

Passing over the odes of the second book, which present little that is new for our present purpose, we come to the third book, introduced by the six Roman odes. These poems have given rise to a vast literature. A student in a Dutch university received his Doctor's degree for summarizing the literature of only eight years, and he used 173 printed pages for the task.<sup>1</sup> It may therefore seem presumptuous to pass over them in the cursory fashion necessary here. But we may apply briefly the principle which we have been illustrating—Horace's use of a carefully worded text—and may throw some light on the points at issue.

The first ode has a brief introduction of four lines intended for the group of six poems. In these lines Horace defines his audience: *virginibus puerisque*. The second stanza is an integral part of the first poem, but may be taken with the whole series, as it acknowledges the greatness of Jupiter. There follows a description of the two things that men crave: first, riches; second, political honor. The latter is subdivided into three parts: one may gain office through birth (*generosior*), through character and reputation (*moribus, fama*), or through the power of a political machine (*turba clientium*). But riches and power will not change fate or bring happiness. This leads directly to the theme, *Desiderantem quod satis est*, "The man who wants but little here below." It is his familiar doctrine of *aurea mediocritas* properly given first place in this group of odes.

The second ode is rather curious. It is a plea for military service for the young on the ostensible ground that *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, "'Tis sweet and glorious to die for one's country." This is the line which Horace wishes his reader to carry away with him, as if it were the whole text. It is an emotional appeal. But the real subject of the poem is the value of military service for the creation of character (*virtus*), since it teaches endur-

<sup>1</sup> Slijpen, *Disputatio Critica de Carminibus Horatii Sex Quae Dicuntur Odae Romanae*, reviewed by the present writer in *Classical Philology*, VII, 510.



ance of hardships, physical bravery, unswerving honesty (a trait of importance in politics), a discreet tongue. We have in this poem a defense of universal military service for its usefulness to the country and to the individual.

The third ode has its theme in the first line: *iustum et tenacem propositi virum*, "The man who is just and holds to his purpose," but it has a special national application in view of the fact that Romulus is cited as one of the examples, and his consequent entrance into heaven motivates the most striking feature of the poem, the long speech of Juno, which has little to do with the main theme. She promises not to interfere with the Trojan Romans any more, provided they do not rebuild Troy. In this group of poems a digression of this nature surely has a special significance, and various explanations have been offered. Possibly the last stanza offers a suggestion: Horace stops himself by the reminder that this is matter for epic, not lyric, poetry. Is not this perhaps a complimentary allusion to Virgil's great work already well under way? The wrath of Juno plays a very prominent part in the *Aeneid*. In i. 6 Horace declines to write an epic about Agrippa and refers specifically to Varius. So here one would naturally think of Varius or Virgil.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth poem is of special interest. It opens with a very long address to the Muses, in which he shows how great their power

<sup>1</sup> There are some striking resemblances between this poem and the *Aeneid*; cf. vs. 64, *Coniuge me Iovis et sorore*, with *Aen.* i. 46 (also said by Juno), *Iovisque et soror et coniunx*. But especially noteworthy is the similarity of the whole speech to Juno's speech in *Aen.* xii. 808 ff. The end of the *Aeneid* is reached only when Jupiter in return for Juno's submission to fate grants her wish that the people of Latium be not called Trojans that dead Troy come not again to life: *occidit, occideritque sinas cum nomine Troia*. This is exactly the point in Horace's ode; cf. vss. 37-42, 61-68. So true is this, that Juno's speech in this ode has often been explained as an attack on the supposed intention to move the seat of the empire to the East. But no such explanation is possible in the *Aeneid*. Virgil's purpose is to explain why the Roman language and civilization are essentially Latin, not Trojan. From the artistic standpoint Juno quite naturally saves her face as she makes possible the end of the epic. It is she who begins and ends the *Aeneid*. It was natural enough for Virgil to explain to his friends the plan of his work, to read to them his prose outline (cf. Donatus) or completed portions of the poem, as he did to Augustus about 23 or 22 B.C. (cf. Donatus and Servius). A literary man like Horace would be particularly interested to be shown the technique by which Juno's wrath was to be finally placated. The ode was probably written between 27 and 23 B.C.

is. The introduction is so lengthy as a compliment to Augustus, who is enjoying the companionship of the Muses (vss. 37 ff.). This leads to the thought that it is they who give to the emperor *lene consilium*, "a policy of moderation." The story of the battle of the gods and giants which is then introduced has given editors much trouble because it seems to lack connection with the preceding matter, but it is an illustration of the power of *consilium* over *vis*. This is summed up in the text of the poem in verse 65: *Vis consili expers mole ruit sua*, "Power without intelligence falls of its own weight." The use of the word *consilium* in verses 41 and 65 ties the poem together.

The fifth ode centers about *vera virtus* (vs. 29) in its narrow sense of courage. The poem is a plea for patriotism of the highest order, illustrated at length by the story of Regulus.

The sixth poem has as its text: *Dis te minorem quod geris, imperas*, "You rule, O Roman, by subordinating yourself to the gods" (vs. 5), and is a plea for the Roman religion.

To sum up, the subjects developed in the six odes are temperance, the value of military service, tenacity of purpose, the wise policy of Augustus, patriotism, and religion.

We may well conclude our discussion of Horatian ethics with these six odes, whose importance has never failed of recognition during the 2,000 years in which Horace has served as professor of ethics in all the colleges of the occidental world.